

Development Services 2003 Customer Roundtable Sessions Summary

(Revised 9/2/04)

Executive Summary

Every other year the Development Services Division conducts a series of interviews with various consulting firms involved in land development in Clark County. From May through September of this year, the Development Services manager and team leaders conducted interviews with ten development consulting firms. Our approach was to simply ask how were we doing and what changes would they suggest we make to improve our service? Their comments are listed below. Also included is a list of "Proposed/Completed Actions" that respond to the issues raised.

We greatly appreciate the time and suggestions each of these firms gave to help us set our agenda for improving our service. Thank you to the following:

-  Aspen North Park, LLC
-  JD White
-  Jolly-Foster Group, Inc.
-  LSW Architects
-  MacKay & Sposito
-  Miller Nash, LLP
-  Olsen Engineering, Inc.
-  Planning Solutions, Inc.
-  Sturtevant Consulting
-  WRG

Pre-app:

- Times have changed for the applicant... the decision to go forward with the project is made 90% of the time at the pre-app conference
- Need more thorough reviews with specific comments by staff, particularly for transportation (including concurrency) and stormwater
- Staff needs to reveal all the bad news and make the tough calls at pre-app (e.g., will staff support a road mod?)
- Need to respond to questions raised in application at conference
- Delete requirement for SEPA checklist at pre-app (presently required by code)
- Listing of fees in report needs to be double checked for accuracy
- Need to provide conference summary report at conference
- Need to make pre-app waivers easier and quicker

Review Process/Staff Report:

- Need to make sure standard conditions apply and if not, remove them from the report
- Make sure staff reports reflect staff/applicant agreements
- Make sure conditions are specific vs. just referencing code section
- SEPA comment period is too late in process to resolve issues before the hearing
- Should allow submittal of final construction at preliminary plan review stage

Public Hearings:

- Have the examiners develop rules of evidence, how to handle settlements, etc.

Health Department:

- If no wells or septic systems are proposed, why require a HD review?
- Get the HD out of signing the final plat

Code:

- Extensive list of minor changes needed

Proposed/Completed Actions

Key:

- ☐ Issue/suggestion not yet addressed
- ❖ Work underway
- ✓ Work Finished

Pre-App:

- ❖ Meet with planning and engineering staff to establish minimum pre-application review expectations (e.g., being prepared; tough calls up front, commitments and honoring them, and thorough reviews). (Underway – first of several meetings held to explore possible actions)
- ✓ Need to respond to questions raised in application at conference (Finished – Staff notified and pre-app report form revised to require listing of application questions)
- ✓ Ensure that all conference attendees (including staff) sign the sign-in sheet to document attendance. (Finished – Staff notified and Team Leaders will monitor)
- ✓ Review pre-app waiver process and establish policy/guidelines to more easily waive minor project pre-apps. (Finished – Development Services policy number MD-DS1151)
- ❖ Allow pre-app waiver request via e-mail and make decision within 1 week. (Underway - Process established via Team Leaders, but not yet marketed.)
- ✓ Eliminate SEPA checklist from submittal requirements. (Finished – New Title 40 – effective January 1, 2004)

- ✓ Review conference report fee schedule (Finished – Report form reviewed for errors and team leaders to review fees within reports before issuance)
- ✓ Require applicant to indicate the number of anticipated pre-app attendees upon application (Finished – Handout/application updated to ask for number of anticipated participants)
- ✓ Do not allow the public to comment during pre-app conference, unless required for infill projects. (Finished – Staff notified, but may allow public comment at end of conference if time is available)
- ❖ Consider issuing pre-app reports at meeting. (Underway – first of several meetings held to explore possible actions)

Application:

- ✓ Provide application fee quotes via phone or e-mail prior to preliminary plan review submittals. (Finished – Contact Customer Service for specifics)
- ✓ Create new policy that accepts incorrect application fees with adjustment made prior to fully complete determination. (Finished)
- ❑ Establish process whereby applicant may pay pre-app waiver fee upon submittal of the preliminary plan application.
- ✓ Often have Typing (i.e., Type I, II or III reviews) questions per the criteria and not sure how one introduces the question... need some type of protocol. (Finished)

Review Process/Staff Reports:

- ❑ Start SEPA comment period earlier in the process for Type III reviews (e.g., consider optional SEPA process)
- ✓ Make conditions of approval more specific and clear, and remove non applicable standard conditions (Finished – Staff notified and Team Leaders will monitor through staff report review and approval)
- ✓ Look into establishing a “premium pre-app” option that requires more detailed submittals (e.g., traffic study) and a more thorough review, with the resulting go ahead to submit construction plans for review; additional review fees would be acceptable. (Finished – Allowed under 90-day review process).
- ❖ Consider establishing a 30-day Type II review process whereby there is no pre-app, no fully complete process and no additional submittals after application. (Underway – Several meeting have been held to explore this option)
- ✓ Consider using applicant’s facility for meetings if a large group is anticipated to attend. (Finished – Staff notified of option)
- ✓ Remove Health District (HD) from preliminary review process if no septic or well systems are proposed (Finished – New process established whereby evaluation letter is required at final construction plan review if no wells or septic systems proposed)
- ✓ Get HD out of signing the final plat (Finished – HD signs only if wells or septic systems are used)

Public Hearings:

- ☐ Have the examiners develop rules of evidence, how to handle settlements, etc.

Code/Form Changes:

- ✓ Consider code change to remove SEPA requirement at pre-app. (Finished – Included in new Title 40 Unified Development Code, effective January 1, 2004)
- ✓ Amend submittal checklist to include “full right of way” (Finished – Handout and submittal checklist amended; included in new Title 40 Unified Development Code, effective January 1, 2004)
- ✓ Develop “Review Typing Guidelines” and/or protocol for determining review Type (Finished)
- ☐ Have staff resolve mutually exclusive requirements relative to stormwater and habitat
- ❖ Consider 90-day program the norm vs. exception. (Underway – part of 90-day pilot review process)
- ✓ Send comments from this summary onto the respective division managers. (Finished)
- ☐ Look into the cross circulation requirement and have staff give it a “practicality test”
- ❖ Need to make extensive code amendments to include:
 - Landscaping buffer and plant standards
 - Loading docks
 - Binding site plan
 - Building vs. parking setbacks [Underway – Created staff committee to prepare written code interpretations and propose (twice yearly) code amendments to the Board.]
- ✓ Create Binding Site Plan Handout (Finished)

Roundtable Comments

(Note: Some comments are redundant, but reflect that more than one group made comment on the issue)

Overall:

- Over the last several years have witnessed marked improvements.
- They appreciate us coming over and the opportunity to talk about the process.
- They like the draft staff report.
- For a 20-40 lot subdivision, the developer is paying about \$500 – 1000 per day, so processing time is critical.
- They wait for the draft report to be sent before the go-ahead is given for development of construction plans.

- It takes about 4 weeks to develop engineering plans... includes new topo's.
- The land sale is normally consummated at the time of the preliminary land use decision.
- "X" employee is very responsive.
- Need to conduct sub-area plans and include current planners in the process.
- Overall, planning is more responsive.
- Need visitor parking.
- Café is a great place to hold meetings with clients.
- County can use consultant facilities for meetings if group is too large.
- Really appreciate coming out to visit.
- Would like to thank you and your team for taking the time to meet with us to discuss the preliminary planning process.
- Your handouts are well used.
- Rarely need to come to office or contact county due to web page.
- Maps on line is great.
- Would like to be able to access permit history by parcel number.
- Would like to get factors of permit demand and permit status (note: "Fax-on-line" service available).
- Things are much improved.
- Appreciate Team Leader keeping things moving along... need someone like this in engineering to final approval.
- Our joint meeting involving "X" project was a good meeting... staff was very positive and helpful – good attitude.
- We try to work with whatever process is presented to us... no big issues.
- Frustrating to work with an engineer at the preliminary review stage and work out the issues and conditions, and then go to final engineering and get a new engineer with different issues... ones that have been worked out with the previous engineer, and new issues. Not sure that it is a process issue... maybe just a personnel issue. As we conveyed in the meeting, we are generally pleased with the preliminary planning process and we are happy to see that the County is committed to improving the process even more. Like the working relationship with the county planner – good at communicating as they go through the process via e-mail, conversations draft staff report etc. No one else does it this way.
- Seems like the county has an extensive list of submittal requirements, but they seem justified. Portland has an extensive list too.
- Engineering issues – sometimes engineers look at conditions of approval as black and white at final construction stage, and then the next engineer sometimes doesn't even consider the conditions.
- Consistency in engineering review is the issue.
- We want to use the preliminary stormwater work at the final, yet sometimes the proposal is not challenged at preliminary, but is later challenged.

- Feasibility for stormwater at preliminary is great (vs. requiring the more detailed design).
- Individually, the divisions are working well, but they are not working together (e.g., signing and striping – use to submit together with final construction plans, now told to submit it upstairs).
- The group is not interested in Development Services timeliness and performance reports because the group is working with schools.
- We do not differentiate between preliminary and final processes other than to emphasize that the whole process should be shortened for school projects.
- Unlike private projects, schools have already made a decision on completing a project before a pre-app.
- It will be best if engineering plans are submitted concurrently with preliminary application or thereafter because the school must be occupied by next September.
- Need to shorten timeline for school projects to 6 months (from application to construction).
- Development Engineering has been the ultimate hold-up because of numerous iterations.

Deadlines:

- Not concerned about the intermittent timelines, just the overall from pre-app to building permit... this is all the client is concerned about.
- 85% of all projects have made the decision to go to final construction at preliminary plan review.

Type I Reviews:

- We submit very few Type I reviews.
- Often have Typing questions per the criteria and not sure how one introduces the question... need some type of protocol.
- Submit Type I review... then find out it is a Type II review, therefore, get rid of Type I reviews.

Pre-Application Conferences:

- Pre=app is the only chance to see all staff at same time
- This is the time for tough calls (don't be optimistic, just frank)... this is the time the applicant must determine if they will proceed or drop the project, therefore, need to know all the pitfalls and whether the project is feasible.
- Engineering is unpredictable – some conduct a thorough review while others don't... this also is the time when 1st impressions (on the applicant) have their effect for the rest of the project life – where the comfort level of the applicant is established.
- Concerned when the public is allowed to participate – there is only 1 hour (which is being paid for by the applicant) and often there is a lot of ground to cover.

- Pre-app waivers should be more easily granted for minor projects.
- Reports range from thorough to brief – need substantial review (recognizing it depends upon submittal).
- Reports need to be correct relative to impact fees (perhaps have a second set of eyes double check the figure prior to mailing).
- Need option to skip pre-app or more waivers.
- Report is of little value – rarely look at them.
- Short plats don't need pre-apps.
- Prefer an informal pre-app and not a scheduled one.
- Would like to get report at conference.
- Typical hold ups for land divisions is driveway and intersection spacing, but not get word on whether a road mod would be accepted at pre-app.
- Pre-apps at Vancouver better because you get a more technical review and conference reports are issued at the conference.
- Need more information on stormwater and Fire Marshal issues.
- Environmental issues are usually front loaded.
- For some cases, would like the option to have a pre pre-app, and maybe delay the fees to later in the process.
- City not require SEPA checklist nor developer's packet at pre-app.
- At pre-app, need all the bad news... don't wait until later.
- 90% of all clients want the building permit issued within 90 days. This means the preliminary plan review is no longer the red or green light stage; the go or no go is at the pre-app stage.
- Need to ask how many will be attending the pre-app conference to arrange adequate meeting facilities.
- At pre-apps, staff members not always show up, and often look at app one-half (½) hour before meeting. If so, why wait three (3) weeks?
- Provide pre-app report at meeting and make copies of other department comments and attach.
- City requires preliminary utility plans at pre-app.
- Make staff come prepared.
- Need to be more open for pre-app waivers:
 - Run of the mill stuff,
 - Previously approve development sites like PUD,
 - Not for original PUD or CU,
 - No variances, and
 - Experience of applicant on similar projects.
- Pre-app waiver – make it easier and quicker – (maybe e-mail within a week).
- Sometimes there is too much of a light analysis – “x” employee does a concise analysis.
- Information is too general and not specific enough to the subject project (e.g., concurrency comments always the same).
- Pre-app has consensus on required transportation (e.g., R-O-W), then report says something else (e.g., required improvements).

- Fire Marshal is never there.
- They use pre-app report to calculate fees – prefer use table vs. total.
- Great for requesting up-front information (per application form question), but not getting adequate information back.
- Comments from staff are too general on site plans, but know if you submit a good plan, you get better comments.
- Sometimes feel material is not even being read by staff.
- Setback issues not show up until they see conditions of approval.
- Would like breakdown of fees in pre-app report.
- Transportation – cross circulation – need a more decisive answer, and if a road mod needed, staff needs to indication whether they will support it.
- Would like to get pre-app report at meeting and have the ability to write in report agreements made at the conference.
- Sometimes issues are brought to the pre-app (per the application question), yet is not addressed at the conference. These issues are, however, usually addressed in the conference report. This has only occurred 1 or 2 times.
- City comes to conference with notes – nice to get them sooner, but no big deal.
- Like the City's pre-app review because it often includes substantive comments.
- Fees are sometimes not included or are in error. Maybe using old forms.
- Typical is code says frontage improvements needed and if you don't like it – road mod. Applicant needs county staff to indicate whether a road mod would be supported, is a through street reasonable, etc. Need to hear opinions – this is the time to fish or cut bait, not later.
- Road mods need a broader discussions to identify issues.
- Applicants need more predictability about the outcomes relative to transportation issues at the pre-app.
- Fees- not rely on amount – just need to know what ones do not apply
- Issues are put off until staff report is issued – need to do more work at pre-app.
- A few staff members attend the meeting sometimes appear unprepared to discuss the project.
- Other staff may use the opportunity to be introduced to the project. Pre-app reports are mostly not useful – should include more meaningful information that can be used to improve engineering design.
- Maybe the county should consider dropping pre-app for school projects. Schools make decision to build projects before pre-app because these are funded projects.
- Often there are no substantive comments from Transportation and the Fire Marshal.
- We have meetings with Pete Capell and Steve Schulte early in the process before a Pre-app.

Pre-Application meeting with Neighborhood Association:

- They would be willing to meet with the NA and feel, it is a good idea for major projects.
- Should take place after pre-app but before application submittal.
- Need to set different thresholds for requiring NA meeting – not all Type II's would warrant such meetings.

Fully Complete Reviews:

- Appreciate the phone calls prior to the not fully complete letter going out.
- Checklist lists ½ right of way to be shown, but are requiring full right of way (okay, just be consistent... i.e., change the checklist).
- Like idea of getting calls for fully complete items before letter goes out.
- Need more flexibility to accept information that is included, but not necessarily on the right page or in the right format (e.g., may be a note on the pages vs. at the exact geographical location).
- A fully complete meeting prior to issuance of the letter would be helpful... this could be an initial phone call to see if a meeting is needed.
- Would like to simply redline plans at preliminary vs. printing a new set – they need sets for the county and all the associated consultants, which is very expensive.
- For stormwater, the city requires flow rates and proposed systems – still at conceptual stage.
- "X" project got a not fully complete on minor dimension that was not included – should use some discretion here.
- Calling in advance on fully complete items is good.
- There are no problems with FC for schools. Documents are readily available because a school property has all required documents as a public property.

Legal Lot Determination:

- Receive legal lot determination, but not indicate which lots... should list parcel numbers that get legal status.
- Not all lots get reviewed, but should if they are paid for.
- Maybe could tag the lots in GIS indicating legal lot status.

Type II & III Reviews:

- [SEPA] Comment period too late for agencies, e.g., WSDOT submits comments at end of process which is too late to make changes or negotiate (optional SEPA now on Type II's – extend to Type III's as well?).
- The first team (preliminary engineering review team) should also be the 2nd team (construction plan review) to streamline process and minimize rehashing issues already agreed upon during preliminary review. Does not help to have different reviewers.
- Should accept design at some point during preliminary review process to shorten project timeline, OR, Development Engineering should allow

applicant to submit final engineering drawings if DE is satisfied with the review process at about 30-40% through the process.

- Don't know who to speak with if there are transportation issues.
- Submit materials and do not hear from staff until draft report is issued.
- SEPA and public notification requirements are difficult to work with.
- Not sure who the contact person is for a project following preliminary review.
- Last 12 weeks of process is most excruciating.

Staff Reports:

- Some of the standard conditions of approval do not apply and should be removed from report.
- Sometimes there is agreement to change the report at the draft report stage, but the changes never get made and the examiners decision carries the mistake.
- Conditions for fire hydrants need to specify that fire chief approval is needed, not the specific number of hydrants because the number changes later.
- Requiring the TIR up front is very expensive and is a deal breaker for small projects.
- Findings need to be specific.. must meet standard X vs. meet code section ____ (e.g., submit final construction plans vs. meet 13.29A).
- Findings need to be less standard and more tailored to application.

Public Hearings:

- Would like to see HE rules (e.g., handling of evidence and how to handle settlements) – City of Vancouver and King county have such rules.
- Working with staff is good. The issues are worked out with staff prior to the hearing and therefore, the hearing is left for the public to comment.
- Having the staff present the proposal make is easier and simpler. Larger projects, however, require a bigger presentation.
- Like to negotiate before the hearing and know what each is going to say – cleaner and simpler and therefore, not have to hold the record open records or request a continuance.
- Hearings work well.
- Consider having applicant fill out a card indicating how much time is needed at hearing.

Expedited Reviews:

- It is a partnership between the applicant and the county to process these apps, and if we are asking the county to push things forward, then we should expect more from the applicant, including higher quality work... and the applicant would be willing to pay more money if this was to happen.

- Clients would love to have a 90-day review process where final engineering plans are submitted at the preliminary stage, but I would not recommend it. It is a high risk and if changes are made, it is costly to change everything.
- If time is an issue, it would be a good option.
- 30-day review option with no pre-app, no fully complete, and no information submittal after application will work for some straight forward projects.
- Would pay another \$3000 to get their review completed within 30 days.
- The code itself is full of issues that seem to cause problems.
- Like the idea of having options for different types of reviews.
- City 90-day Program (construction plan review): 1st review = 2 weeks each print with 10 days to turn in next round (total 10 days for entire process); 2nd review = no new changes – sign sheets, but note to make the following changes; 3rd review = kills project in the 90 day process; Conducting 5 pilot projects; Can't submit building until TC.
- County 90-day program: Why have concurrent plan reviews in July? Can't build until next summer anyway. Have a meeting at preliminary to help staff get up to speed. Less expensive to do all at preliminary and final plan review at the preliminary review stage. Ask for final construction with utility review. For 90-day program, if one doesn't meet the deadlines, credibility is shot and the entire program fails.
- Need about 3-7 days for consultant to turn around an information/change request (1 week is fair).
- Should shorten the review time for schools because they have to open up in September.
- Are there any ways to shorten the process for school replacement projects?
- Replacement projects should not be treated as new projects.

Other:

- Problem with bringing-in check for wrong fee (and sometimes need to get check cut out of state).
- Transportation most controversial of all .
- Problem with getting the correct app fee... checks are sometimes cut out of state, and, therefore, need to have an accurate amount. – need advanced fee estimate.
- Given no certainty – they submit ASAP, vs. complete review up front.
- Maybe consider staying at 8, 9 and 10 PM, etc. hearing times – for predictability.
- One item that we have been frustrated with is the land use counter and the process of submitting land use applications and getting land use information. Waits of an hour or more are not uncommon when submitting a land use application - keep in mind that the hour does not include the

actual submittal time. Planners here have sometimes taken over two hours to submit an application.

- I thought that there was talk of cross training the building and land use counter staff when the County moved to the new building. This seemed to be an excellent idea as it is often the case that either building or land use is busy but typically not both. It seems that the resources are there, they just aren't divided evenly at times.
- Final construction plans should be accommodated during preliminary review.
- Engineering – two different reviewers and two different set of requirements
- Web page has been a God send.
- Time is required to negotiate at final site plan and construction plan review... therefore, need to have a quick review time.
- Preliminary process has the 120 day review deadline, but final engineering does not have this in state law.
- Understand that a recent policy does set such deadlines for engineering reviews.
- Time to get review from HD is too long.
- If no septic or wells are proposed, why need Health Department okay?
- Question why changes to plans after final site plan approval is not eligible for post decision review.
- Hearing continuance fee is too high... not tied to additional cost to county.

Code:

- Why do you require submittal of draft SEPA at pre-app?
- Loading docks not always necessary, yet no flexibility – retail over 5,000 SF not needed, therefore, a variance is needed.
- Loading docks for office industrial not needed due to flex office space – should have loading dock criteria and should place code provision on hold until it is fixed.
- Landscape buffer or wall and 6' wall needs change.
- Need more specific landscaping standards such as size and height – it will help convince developer to do a better job.
- Binding site plan needs change and need handout educate staff.
- Building vs. parking set backs is not clear.
- At preliminary plan review, planner serves as coordinator, at final construction, engineer should serve as coordinator.
- May need a meeting with staff half way through process (maybe after close of public comment period).
- HOLD process needs an e-mail from confirmation.
- Need to triage re-submittals of final construction plans.
- Driveway access standards needs a review as they apply to Hwy 99... standards are too black and white.

- Need to have mutually inclusive standards for stormwater and habitat... applicant gets into a catch 22 between these two standards... will require some ordinance changes (e.g., how close can you grade to a tree?).
- Transportation is the major issue – cross circulation requirement, if it makes no sense... why is a road mod still needed.
- In-fill projects – only 1 out of 10 go forward because of the costs – need an alternative review process for small projects vs. one size fits all; if not have both frontages improved, forget it; need 60-day review process for in-fill projects.
- Need to look at the long term (via sub-area plans), rather than a case-by-case approach.